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1 — INVESTIGATIONS INTO ARKEMA PLANT FIRES UNDERWAY AFTER HARVEY, Texas Standard, 9/25/17

<http://www.texasstandard.org/stories/categories/energy-environment/>

Environmental regulators are looking into fires that broke out at a Houston-area chemical plant after Harvey. It's been about a month since the storm, but people near the flooded Arkema, Inc. plant are still under a health advisory. Those residents east of Houston were among those hit particularly bad by the storm. Not only were they flooded: they found themselves inside the danger zone put in place after the plant caught fire.

2 — HOW MILITARY OUTSOURCING TURNED TOXIC, ProPublica, 9/25/17

<https://features.propublica.org/military-pollution/military-pollution-contractors-scandal-toxic-cleanups/>

IN AUGUST 2016, an inspector from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency arrived at Barksdale Air Force base in Louisiana, a nerve center for the U.S. military's global air combat operations, to conduct a routine look at the base's handling of its hazardous waste. Barksdale, like many military bases, generates large volumes of hazardous materials, including thousands of pounds of toxic powder left over from cleaning, painting and maintaining airplanes.

3 City, state officials spar over funding Harvey recovery efforts at Houston meeting, Texas Tribune, 9/25/17

<https://www.texastribune.org/2017/09/25/city-and-state-officials-spar-over-funding-harvey-recovery-efforts/>

While several Texas officials have thrown support behind some expensive flood control projects, a Houston City Council meeting Monday highlighted the political and financial hurdles that may await such efforts.

4 — Team to examine how agency 'engages with industry', Greenwire, 9/25/17

<https://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2017/09/25/stories/1060061583>

U.S. EPA announced the formation of a Smart Sectors team as part of a planned restructuring for its policy office. The Smart Sectors team within the Office of Policy is set to "re-examine how EPA engages with industry," according to a Federal Register notice posted Friday. The goal of the team is to "reduce unnecessary regulatory burden, create certainty and predictability, and improve the ability of both EPA and industry to conduct long-term regulatory planning while also protecting the environment and public health," according to the notice.

5 — EPA sends ozone implementation rule to White House, Greenwire, 9/25/17

<https://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2017/09/25/stories/1060061605>

With U.S. EPA nearing a key compliance deadline for its 2015 ground-level ozone standard, the agency has sent a related regulation to the White House Office of Management and Budget for review, according to the Reginfo.gov site. The site describes the regulation as both a "proposed rule" and a "final action" that will "establish the air quality thresholds that define the classifications assigned to all nonattainment areas" for the 2015 standard.

6 — Multiple challenges remain to Fukushima nuclear cleanup, Houston Chron, 9/26/17

<http://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/science/article/Multiple-challenges-remain-to-Fukushima-nuclear-12228664.php>

Japan's government approved a revised road map Tuesday to clean up the radioactive mess left at the Fukushima nuclear power plant after it was damaged beyond repair by an earthquake and tsunami in 2011. Decommissioning the damaged reactors is an uncertain process that is expected to take 30 to 40 years.

7 OPINION: Infrastructure can't wait, Post and Courier, 9/26/17

http://www.postandcourier.com/opinion/commentary/infrastructure-can-t-wait/article_afaa6598-a221-11e7-8fab-1b777af93db4.html

We are at the height of hurricane season as South Carolinians well know. After Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, the United States must not only help our sisters and brothers in Texas and Florida, but as a nation, become better prepared for future natural disasters. That means preventing the many factors that have contributed to certain storm intensity of hurricanes and regional flooding, plus mitigating the impacts from climate change, rising seas, and several decades of unchecked urban sprawl leading to a host of environmental, economic, and social concerns. That also means investing in and strengthening America's infrastructure.

8 Planner chosen for Isle de Jean Charles resettlement site, Times Picayune, 9/26/17

http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2017/09/planner_chosen_for_isle_de_jea.html

A Baton Rouge firm has been selected for the unique task of designing a community to replace one that's sinking under the sea. Louisiana's Office of Community Development hired architecture and engineering firm CSRS Inc. to develop plans for the resettlement of Isle de Jean Charles, a small island in Terrebonne Parish that gets smaller every year.

9 West Tulsa chemical spill unlikely to affect humans or wildlife, Fox 23, 9/25/17

<http://www.fox23.com/news/west-tulsa-chemical-spill-unlikely-to-affect-humans-or-wildlife/614519870>

AZZ Galvanizing reported a chemical spill Monday morning. The west Tulsa company reported a leak of sodium hydroxide, or lye, around 9 a.m. The leak reportedly started around 3 a.m. when a 14,000 gallon tank of the sodium hydroxide was overfilled.

10 Water loss accountability improved, treatment plants receive repairs, Paris Express, 9/26/17

<http://www.paris-express.com/news/20170926/water-loss-accountability-improved-treatment-plants-receive-repairs>

At the Sept. 21 meeting of the Hot Springs Village public works/public utilities meeting director Jason Temple informed members of some good news. Thanks to the leadership of chief water plant operator Chris Boutzale, public utility staff discovered a 6-inch water main located after the main meter for water entering the water distribution system that was previously unknown and recirculating back to the water plant's main water meter to read 4.4 percent (3,456,000 gallons) more finished water per month than was actually being delivered to the distribution system.

11 Might dicamba be affecting pollinators?, Delta Farm Express, 9/26/17

<http://www.deltafarmpress.com/soybeans/might-dicamba-be-affecting-pollinators>

Since Xtend crops have been planted in the Mid-South, the focus of off-target damage from dicamba has largely been on soybeans. But what about some of the damage to more peripheral, but no less vital, players in the agricultural chain? Before getting to that, it's important to know that Richard Coy isn't a man afraid to take a stand for his farming partners.

12 CROP DAMAGE UNACCEPTABLE, SAYS SOY GROUP SEEKING PATH FORWARD ON DICAMBA, Ag.com, 9/26/17

<http://www.agriculture.com/news/crops/crop-damage-unacceptable-says-soy-group-seeking-path-forward-on-dicamba>

The dicamba “issue” — widespread reports of crop damage from using the weedkiller — “isn’t going away. In fact, it’s only getting worse,” said Ron Moore, the American Soybean Association president and an Illinois farmer. “We are committed to establishing both a cause and a path forward ... including what actions need to be taken to assure that soybean farmers can use the product safely without damaging their own or their neighbors’ crops.”

13 Work on catch basins hits major snag, La. Weekly, 9/25/17

<http://www.louisianaweekly.com/work-on-catch-basins-hits-major-snag/>

As the City of New Orleans continues to get its pumps working to full capacity, repair all of its turbines that fuel the pumps and clear out the city’s catch basins during the peak of the Atlantic hurricane season, efforts to ensure that all of the catch basins are clear of debris and working properly have hit a major snag, WWL News reported last week. The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality told a local contractor to stop clearing debris from catch basins and drain lines, raising concerns about where the contractor, RAMJ Construction LLC, was dumping the debris its vacuum trucks pulled out of the city’s drainage system.

14 Pruitt plans to release schedule, Greenwire, 9/22/17

<https://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2017/09/22/stories/1060061477>

U.S. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt is planning to release his public calendar, long sought by his critics on Capitol Hill and in the environmental movement. Sen. Tom Carper (D-Del.), ranking member on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, offered faint praise for the move by Pruitt. Earlier this year, the Democratic senator had called on the EPA chief to release his schedule on a monthly basis (E&E News PM, March 17).

15 NMED Confirms Lifting 'Boil Water Advisory' For Artesia Municipal System, Morningside Users Coop, Los Alamos Daily Post, 9/26/17

<http://www.ladailypost.com/content/nmed-confirms-lifting-boil-water-advisory-artesia-municipal-system-morningside-users-coop>

The New Mexico Environment Department’s (NMED) Drinking Water Bureau is confirming that the Artesia Municipal Water System has met the requirements to lift the “boil water advisory” for the Artesia Municipal Water System and Morningside Water Users Cooperative located in Eddy County. Artesia Municipal Water System and Morningside Water Users Cooperative were required to issue the advisory Sept. 16, 2017 after bacteriological contamination that exceeded the Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) for E. coli was discovered in drinking water at the Artesia water system. The advisory only applied to customers served by the Artesia Municipal Water System and Morningside Water Users Cooperative and did not extend to any of the other surrounding water systems or communities.

16 Water loss accountability improved, treatment plants receive repairs, Paris Express, 9/26/17

<http://www.paris-express.com/news/20170926/water-loss-accountability-improved-treatment-plants-receive-repairs>

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From [Houston Public Media](#):

Environmental regulators are looking into fires that broke out at a Houston-area chemical plant after Harvey. It's been about a month since the storm, but people near the flooded Arkema, Inc. plant are still under a [health advisory](#).

Those residents east of Houston were among those hit particularly bad by the storm. Not only were they flooded: they found themselves inside the danger zone put in place after the plant caught fire.



He's not happy with how the company has handled the aftermath.

Arkema insists it's been working to get locals affected by the evacuation the help they need, but Mincey said they've been hard to reach.

"For me, money is not the end of the day issue. I want them to help me out a little bit, but I wanna feel like they're sorry," he says.

The company didn't make anyone available for an interview for this story, but even before the fires started, during Harvey, Arkema's CEO Rich Rowe did have a message.

"I apologize," he said. "We apologize."

Rowe told reporters his company had not planned for such intense flooding. The floodwaters shutdown power needed to keep the chemicals refrigerated. When portable backup generators failed, the chemicals ignited.

"No one anticipated we'd be looking at a site with six feet of water on it," Rowe says.

Mincey, the nearby resident, is understanding, but still frustrated.

"You know, I don't think anybody at Arkema set out with a goal to hurt people out here," he says. "They didn't think they were going to get get six feet of water, but what are they going to about it next time?"

Multiple agencies are now looking into how the company dealt with the incident.

State regulators are investigating any possible impacts from the fires and looking into whether the company violated pollution rules.

begun asking questions: Did they do that? Did they have adequate generation? Did they have redundancy, with respect to those trailers that blew up?' We don't know yet. There's some concern that they didn't."

"I think we're in a new reality in terms of the frequency and intensity of these storms," says Elena Craft, with the Environmental Defense Fund. She argues that Harvey shows the need for stricter chemical safety rules that were proposed by the Obama Administration, but that Pruitt has since [delayed](#).

Critics said the rules, which would have made plant hazards more public, would have given terrorists access to sensitive information.

At the University of Houston, chemical engineer Ramanan Krishnamoorti says the petrochemical industry handled Harvey pretty well, but the Arkema fires do reveal a bigger problem.

"Where we have failed, systematically since Katrina, has been in how we store chemicals," he says.

"Almost every single incident that you've seen during Harvey, and the flooding after Harvey, has been associated with the storage of chemicals, not the production of chemicals."

That, he says, is where the industry needs to turn its attention, as it looks for lessons from Harvey's historic flooding.

Meanwhile, Harris County is advising people near the Arkema plant to only drink bottled water until further notice, as pollution monitoring of the area continues.

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HOW MILITARY OUTSOURCING TURNED TOXIC



Fraud. Bribery. Incompetence. The military's use of contractors adds to a legacy of environmental damage.

by Abrahm Lustgarten, ProPublica

Photography by Ashley Gilbertson/VII Photo, special to ProPublica

September 26, 2017

IN AUGUST 2016, an inspector from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency arrived at Barksdale Air Force base in Louisiana, a nerve center for the U.S. military's global air combat operations, to conduct a routine look at the base's handling of its hazardous waste.

Barksdale, like many military bases, generates large volumes of hazardous materials, including thousands of pounds of toxic powder left over from cleaning, painting and maintaining airplanes.

For years, Barksdale had been sending a portion of its waste to an Ohio company, U.S. Technology Corp., that had sold officials at the base on a seemingly ingenious solution for disposing of it: The company would take the contaminated powder from refurbished war planes and repurpose it into cinderblocks that would be used to build everything from schools to hotels to big-box department stores — even a pregnancy support center in Ohio. The deal would ostensibly shield the Air Force from the liability of being a large producer of dangerous hazardous trash.

The arrangement was not unique.

The military is one of the country's largest polluters, with an inventory of toxic sites on American soil that once topped 39,000. At many locations, the Pentagon has relied on contractors like U.S. Technology to assist in cleaning and restoring land, removing waste, clearing unexploded bombs, and decontaminating buildings, streams and soil. In addition to its work for Barksdale, U.S. Technology had won some 830 contracts with other military facilities — Army, Air Force, Navy and logistics bases — totaling more than \$49 million, many of them to dispose of similar powders.

In taking on environmental cleanup jobs, contractors often bring needed expertise to technical tasks the Pentagon isn't equipped to do itself. They also absorb much of the legal responsibility for disposing of military-made hazards, in some cases helping the Pentagon — at least on paper — winnow down its list of toxic liabilities.

But in outsourcing this work, the military has often struggled to provide adequate oversight to ensure that work is done competently — or is completed at all. Today, records show, some of

is cleanup work that has been entrusted to contractors remains unfinished or worse, has been falsely pronounced complete, leaving people who live near former military sites to assume these areas are now safe. [Donate](#)

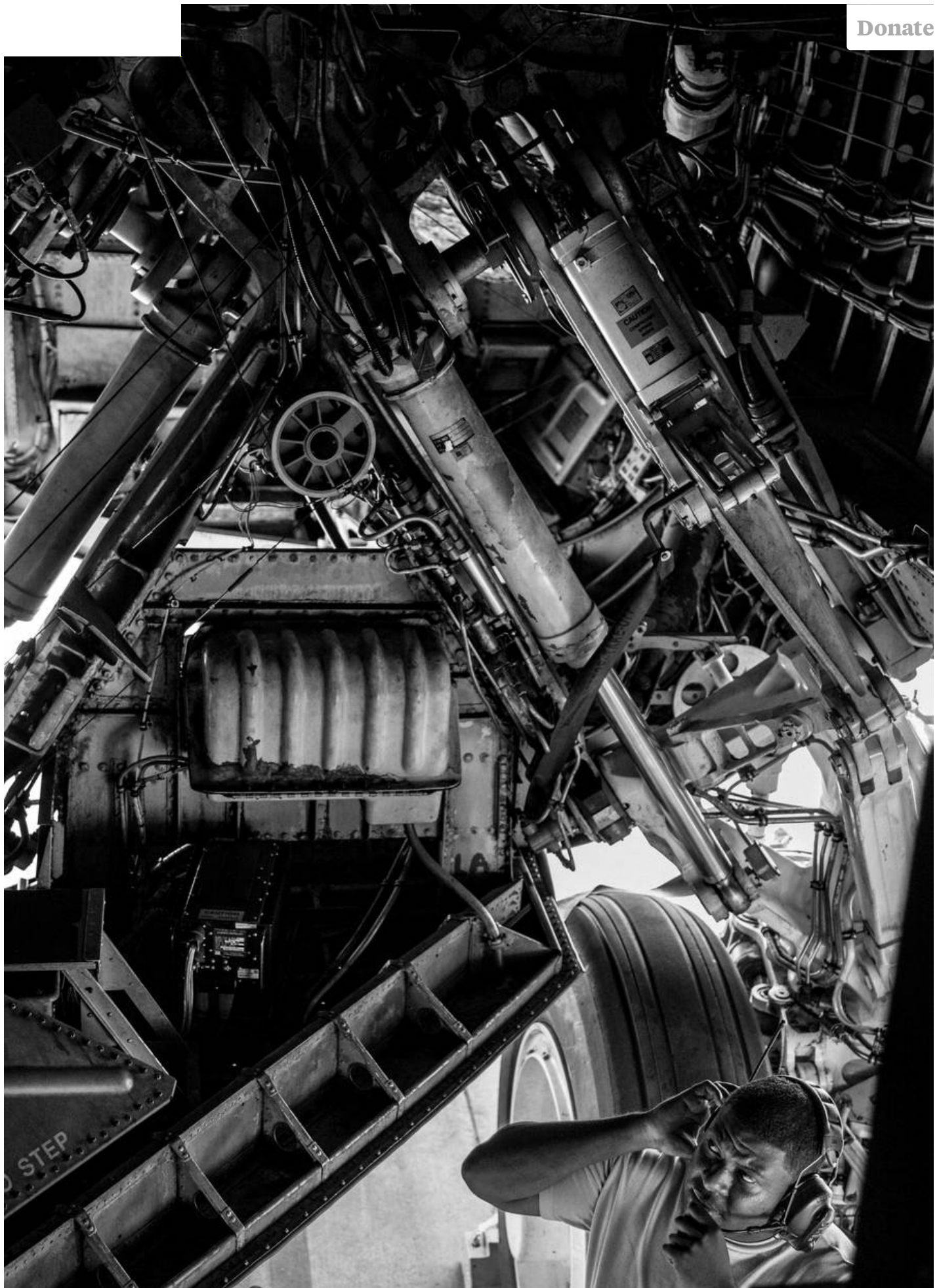
What the EPA inspector found when he visited Barksdale was an object lesson in the system's blind spots.

Barrels of the waste hadn't been shipped off and recycled, but rather were stored in a garage tucked away from the facility's main operations. Further, shipping documents suggested that what waste had been sent off the base hadn't gone to U.S. Technology's recycling plant in Ohio, as an Air Force official first told the EPA, but instead had gone to company warehouses in at least two other states. Storing hazardous waste without a permit — and without immediately recycling it — can be illegal.

The inspection findings triggered an investigation to determine if the Air Force had been storing hazardous waste that it was supposed to have been recycling without a permit. It also suggested broader problems with U.S. Technology, which was already the subject of an inquiry in Georgia into whether it was illegally dumping waste — including material that could have come from Barksdale — near a residential neighborhood there.

Barksdale officials told ProPublica that the base “has never stored” hazardous materials at the request of U.S. Technology. The Air Force and the Pentagon declined to answer any specific questions about U.S. Technology's work, except to say that the base had been working with the company for at least a decade.

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U.S. Air Force Tech Sergeant Jonathan Hayes works on a B-52 bomber from the 307th Bomb Wing at Barksdale Air Force Base. For more than a decade the Air Force has relied on a private company to handle its waste, even though that company has been associated with multiple investigations and fraud.

ProPublica pieced together what happened at Barksdale using EPA records, including a 1,000-page document compiled by one of its lead investigators, as well as Air Force correspondence, court files, Pentagon contracts and other materials.

The documents make clear that officials at Barksdale should have been wary of doing business with U.S. Technology from the start. The head of one of its sub-contractors had been sent to prison in 2008 for illegally dumping hazardous waste under another Pentagon contract. U.S. Technology had been investigated for related wrongdoing — storing or dumping material it claimed to be recycling — in two other states. Indeed, a 2011 Pentagon report to Congress about contractor fraud included U.S. Technology on a list of companies that had criminal or civil judgments against them, but which still received millions of dollars in subsequent contracts.

Neither the Air Force nor the Pentagon would respond to questions about why the various military branches continued to award contracts to U.S. Technology despite its problems.

The EPA also would not say whether it was looking into U.S. Technology's contracts with other bases — deals involving millions of pounds of toxic powder and tens of millions of taxpayer dollars — but such a step might well be prudent.

In April, U.S. Technology's founder and president, Raymond Williams, was indicted in U.S. District Court in Missouri for trucking millions of pounds of its hazardous powder waste — from Defense and other types of contracts — over state lines, where, according to EPA documents, the company had been storing it instead of recycling it. In June, Williams was indicted in Georgia on federal charges related to bribing an Air Force official for recycling contracts. Williams has pleaded not guilty in both cases.

Asked about Barksdale and other contracts that have gone awry, one of the Pentagon's top environmental officials told ProPublica that there is no systemic problem with the military's approach to cleanup or other environmental contracting. Maureen Sullivan, the deputy assistant secretary of defense for environment, safety and occupational health, said the military might have thousands of companies under contract at any given time and that the Barksdale case and others like it amount to rare examples of negligence or incompetence.

“Not everybody is an angel,” Sullivan said.

and its various monitors have issued repeated warnings about problems related to environmental cleanup contractors. [Donate](#)

In 2001, the Defense Department's own inspector general discussed the "significant risk of fraud" in environmental cleanup contracts as one of the Pentagon's "high risk vulnerabilities." That report did not list recommendations for reform, chiefly because many of the office's previous efforts imploring changes had been ignored.

A decade later, the U.S. Government Accountability Office concluded that many Pentagon environmental cleanup contracts were vulnerable to corner-cutting, lack of quality review and plain incompetence. The report made clear that the department relied heavily on performance-based contracts despite federal guidelines which cautioned against using them for environmental jobs, perhaps because doing so furthered the Pentagon's self-interest in ridding itself of environmental headaches.

"The evidence is in, a contractor is only as good as the oversight that they have," said Jane Williams, the executive director of California Communities Against Toxics, a watchdog group that has been tracking defense site cleanups across the country since 1989. "The defense department turns a blind eye... They want to write a check and have someone else do it."



Barksdale Air Force Base is home to nearly half of the U.S.'s remaining B-52 fleet, airplanes that are more than 55 years old, and require constant maintenance.

AIRMEN CALL BARKSDALE AIR FORCE base “The Deuce” — home to the 2nd Bombing Wing of the 8th Air Force, a legendary unit in American aerial bombardment with roots going back to World War I. The Wing was moved to Barksdale in 1963, with the production of the B-52. In 1991, seven B-52s flew the longest round-trip combat mission in aviation history from Barksdale’s hangers, firing the first cruise missiles of the first Gulf War into Baghdad from their holds beneath the bombers’ gaping wings.

Today, nearly half of the Air Force’s remaining B-52’s fly from this heavily guarded, 22,000-acre base, which has 8,500 airmen stationed there. Those 185,000-pound hunks of aging, flexing metal — still the workhorse of the nation’s strike force more than 55 years after the last one was made — need an extraordinary amount of work to keep them in the air. At Barksdale, the airplanes’ parts are sanded and painted, corrosion removed, cracks in the fuselage cut out

is drilled hollow and replaced. All so the planes can return to flight t **Donate**
over Eastern Europe or bombing raids against ISIS in Syria.

Essential to this unglamorous, but vital work are millions of tiny glass and plastic beads that machinists use to blast against metal parts to strip away paint and corrosion. The process leaves huge amounts of toxic dust, including the flaked paint and bits of pulverized metal from the planes themselves.

U.S. Technology was founded in 1987 by Williams, described by colleagues as an eccentric entrepreneur with a love for historic fighter planes and airplane design. U.S. Technology and its dozen or so affiliated corporations have tried to sell everything from inexpensive prop fighter planes to the United Arab Emirates to concrete blocks. But the core business has always been the bead blasting and recycling.

For years Barksdale handled the waste produced by its airplane maintenance just as it handled any other hazardous material: It catalogued and labeled it, registered the quantities with the EPA and state authorities, and shipped it to a specialized disposal facility in Kentucky that was licensed to burn or bury the stuff.

But in the last decade, the Pentagon began to press Barksdale and other bases to comply with “waste minimization” rules set out in federal regulations. Barksdale officials said they were required to cut the volume of waste the base produced by 10 percent from 2010 levels by 2020, for example. Increasingly, all bases — which compete for funding and whose officers vie for promotions — are judged on meeting or beating quotas for limiting and then promptly handling waste.

Documents make clear U.S. Technology’s pitch spoke directly to Barksdale and was calibrated to help achieve these aims. The company promised to supply all of the base’s blast powder and then retrieve the spent material — thousands of pounds of it a year — to use as fill to make cinderblocks. The EPA and Ohio environment officials had certified this was relatively safe, so long as the cinderblocks didn’t come into contact with the ground, where they could potentially contaminate food and water supplies.

The deal also promised other benefits.

Because U.S. Technology was a recycler, the toxic material it removed from Barksdale would no longer be classified legally as “hazardous waste.” This semantic end run spared the Air Force from having to meet strict federal regulations for where such waste goes and for protecting people from being harmed by it. As one company sales

recyclable materials “are exempt from regulation as a waste.” It also meant that, at least technically, Barksdale’s ledger would show that it was producing less waste overall, and thus edging closer to the Pentagon’s goals.

U.S. Technology’s sales documents boasted that its approach offered its military customers “maximum protection” from liability and costs related to cleanups, and could maybe even prevent contaminated areas from becoming Superfund sites.

Still, the presentations left out important bits of the company’s history.

In order to be exempt from hazardous waste laws, federal regulations require waste recycling companies like U.S. Technology to re-purpose at least three-quarters of the hazardous material they collect as part of contracts in any given year. The rule is meant to ensure that waste isn’t simply being stored. Storing hazardous waste requires a highly specialized license and, done wrong, can lead to environmental disaster.

In 2002, however, Ohio and EPA investigators inspected U.S. Technology’s plant and found discrepancies in its inventories of hazardous materials received from the military and other customers. Of some 3.6 million pounds of material U.S. Technology had accepted in 2000, for example, only 98,000 pounds of it had been used for recycled products, a figure “well short of the required amount,” according to Ohio state records. In an alleyway next to the building, investigators found stacks of unused outdoor patio furniture apparently molded from hazardous powder but never sold.

“There obviously wasn’t a market for the furniture,” wrote Nyall McKenna, the Ohio environment regulator who led the investigation.

The investigators found that U.S. Technology had directly recycled a small portion of the material, but shipped the vast majority of it to a processing company in Mississippi that U.S. Technology had hired to reformulate the material into large blocks that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers — a Pentagon branch itself — could use in its management of the country’s river systems. But it turned out the processing company, Hydromex, hadn’t been recycling the material either. Instead, it had been burying U.S. Technology’s waste in trenches it dug



The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is investigating whether officials at Barksdale Air Force Base stored hazardous waste from the maintenance of its aircraft against federal regulations, and whether the company it hired to recycle it was instead dumping it.

I then had used the remaining powder to make a concrete slab that c **Donate**
 the notes. By the time the EPA and state regulators learned this, more than 11 million pounds
 of waste from Ohio, and U.S. Technology customers around the country — packed into 25,000
 drums — had been stashed at the site in Yazoo, Mississippi.

Hydromex's owner was sent to prison for more than three years. U.S. Technology and its
 officials avoided prosecution, saying the company was not aware of Hydromex's dumping and
 was itself a victim of fraud. (In a later civil trial, a jury rejected U.S. Technology's fraud claims
 against the property owner of the Hydromex plant.) In the eyes of regulators, though, U.S.
 Technology remained liable for the waste material under environmental law, and would
 ultimately be tasked with removing and — again — properly recycling the dumped waste.



Military installations, including Barksdale, often produce large amounts of hazardous waste. Pentagon officials have set targets for bases to reduce the amount of waste they handle, a program which may be incentivizing the outsourcing of disposal to contractors with little follow-up.

EPA documents and emails obtained by the agency show some of the material dumped in Mississippi came from U.S. military bases and that the case had gotten the attention of the Air Force in particular. At least two other bases — Robins Air Force Base in Georgia and Hill Air Force base in Utah — had been working with U.S. Technology, and others were about to start

formally warned off by headquarters, pending a review, according to [Donate](#)

Force documents.

In the end, though, any Air Force wariness concerning U.S. Technology proved short-lived. Senior brass, as part of their look at what had gone wrong in 2002, visited the company's operations in 2005 and came away with a favorable view.

"U.S. Technology has a very impressive recycling operation," William Hoogsteden, a project manager at the Air Force research laboratory at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio, wrote in a 2005 memo. The company, the official concluded, "looks to be one of the few legitimate and viable recycling processes using spent plastic media."

Another 2005 letter pushed U.S. Technology's appeal explicitly. "Their products help us achieve diversion targets (recycle vs. disposal)," wrote David Fort, an Air Force hazardous waste program manager, in an internal Air Force exchange. "This is something that we simply ought to take advantage of."

In 2006, various Pentagon branches signed 30 contracts with U.S. Technology worth more than \$2.7 million.

THE VOLUME AND COMPLEXITY of environmental cleanup work has led the Pentagon to rely more and more on contractors like U.S. Technology. According to the GAO, such companies now handle nearly all of the hazardous waste the Defense Department generates annually, and, according to Pentagon data obtained by ProPublica, at least 2,400 contaminated cleanup sites across the country have been outsourced to private firms.

Cleaning up contamination at these sites has already consumed more than \$42 billion in taxpayer funds, much of it paid to contractors. By the Pentagon's conservative estimates, the total cleanup bill is likely to top \$70 billion, making Defense pollution one of the most expensive environmental calamities in American history, and a lucrative mainstay for private concerns.

Virtually all Pentagon contracting — for weapons, aircraft, base security, reconstruction in war zones, and more — has come under criticism for cost overruns and, at times, for being open to exploitation. It's impossible to say how environmental cleanup contractors compare to others in these regards. But experts say environmental work is especially hard to monitor; waste disposal and contamination are easy to hide and hard to track. Also, with Pentagon officials under pressure to reduce the list of contaminated sites and cut the costs of attending

ss incentive to question contractors that say problems are fixed or jo **Donate**

gone well.

A lengthy trail of damning reports from military watchdogs, however, suggests the same problems have cropped up time and again when the Pentagon has delegated environmental cleanups to contractors.

In 2015, calling environmental issues a “longstanding material weakness,” the Pentagon’s inspector general said that despite publishing some 20 previous reports on the issue, little progress had been made in adopting recommendations.

One of those previous reports was the 2001 report to Congress, which noted that environmental crimes committed by hazardous waste contractors warranted the majority of attention from the agency’s criminal investigations division. Contractors cut corners, falsely certified as done environmental work they hadn’t completed, illegally dumped dangerous materials, or employed workers who weren’t properly trained for their tasks, the report said, describing such incidents as “typical” and “discussed regularly.”



A water truck sprays down dust at Hunters Point in San Francisco, California in May. The former Navy shipyard is one of thousands of heavily contaminated former defense sites now being being redeveloped for housing and public use.

eral noted that across all branches of the Pentagon, environmental cleanup was the problem because remediation relies so heavily on contractors to self-report their progress. And it also noted that the results of the review were “disappointing because the department made limited progress in carrying out numerous agreed-upon recommendations” from the past.

John Arlington, who researched corruption at defense sites as a former chief investigator for the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, said the problems were epic.

“We discovered a very long history of hazardous disposal practices of the worst sort,” said Arlington, who now serves as general counsel for the SIGAR, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction.

In many cases, egregious malpractice — or even intentional deception — hasn’t been enough to steer the Pentagon away from particular contractors. In San Francisco, in 2016, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission determined that employees of a prominent global environmental engineering firm hired by the Navy had falsified soil samples from a radioactive experiment site soon to be converted to housing in the nation’s hottest real estate market. The contractor, Tetra Tech, has received more than \$2.3 billion in defense contracts over the past decade, and was being paid more than \$300 million for its cleanup in San Francisco.

In a legal petition the San Francisco environment group Greenaction submitted to NRC investigators, several Tetra Tech whistleblowers said that, in order to save money, Tetra Tech managers had ordered them to replace contaminated soil samples with clean soil, dump contaminated soil in trenches on the property, falsify documents certifying the work and manipulate the computer data analyzing radiation levels. Their allegations raised questions about environmental safety across some 420 acres of the site.

Tetra Tech, which conducted an internal investigation and conceded its samples had been swapped, “emphatically denies” that its management was involved or that there was a broader conspiracy at the site, according to a statement the company sent to ProPublica. The NRC, at first, fined Tetra Tech \$7,000, but even that amount was later reduced after an agreement that the company would hold additional training for its employees. A Navy spokesperson said that while Tetra Tech is still under contract, it is no longer doing field work at the site.

At Camp Minden, a former Army ammunition plant now owned by Louisiana and used by its National Guard, a munitions waste recycling contractor’s failures caused a disaster too big to ignore.

As part of a nationwide effort to decommission more than a billion pounds of aging weapons, the Army hired a company called Explo Systems to disassemble 1.3 million artillery charges at Minden. For \$8.6 million, the firm would remove the shells and casings and empty an

...ent powder called M6. Explo claimed to have industrial facilities to r **Donate**
 the M6, and said it would safely destroy some of it while converting the rest into blasting
 charges it planned to sell to the mining industry.

Had the Army ever looked into Explo's capabilities, it would have learned that it had not yet
 built two of the processing facilities it would need to destroy and convert the Army's explosive
 material. Nevertheless, by mid-2012, Explo documents appeared to show that it had shipped
 and sold nearly 18 million pounds of the explosives.

That illusion quite literally blew up on Oct. 15, 2012, when a massive explosion rocked the
 Minden grounds, shattering windows in the town four miles away, toppling 11 rail cars, and
 sending a mushroom cloud 7,000 feet into the sky. EPA records describe a blast radius of raw
 explosives landing as close as a few thousand feet from the nearby town.



An environmental engineering firm with more than \$2 billion in Pentagon contracts has admitted that its employees falsified radioactive soil samples at Hunters Point. Whistleblowers from the firm allege the conduct was part of a larger conspiracy by the company to speed up work and lower costs.

When Louisiana State police executed a search warrant of the base, they found nearly 18
 million pounds of M6 explosives stored haphazardly across the property. Photographs show
 enormous cardboard boxes overstuffed with explosives, sagging under their own weight with

ing their base. The boxes teetered in hallways, were stacked in doorways, **Donate** spilled out in the surrounding yards, where thousands of them were lined up across fields like parked cars at a county fair. Louisiana's extreme heat and humidity had taken its toll, degrading the chemical stabilizers that bond the explosives, until they verged on spontaneous ignition.

The remaining materials could have blown at any time. Louisiana's governor declared a state of emergency, and for a week that December, the small community of Doyline along the base's fence line was evacuated.

"It was a perfect storm," said J.C. King, the Army's director of munitions and the chief official responsible for Army explosives cleanups, in an interview at the Pentagon in July.

King says what happened in Minden, though, is no longer the Army's problem; when Explo signed its contract, it assumed ownership of the explosives and any contamination that might be associated with them, he said. EPA investigators determined Explo had falsified its sales paperwork and, in fact, had few customers; the very premise of its Army contract was a lie. Six of its executives wound up indicted. They have pleaded not guilty, and are currently awaiting trial in Louisiana. Explo Systems declared bankruptcy the next fall, abandoning the explosives. Its executives did not respond to a request for comment made through their attorney.

Despite the substantial real-world harm that has resulted from misconduct by contractors, the Pentagon continues to rely ever more heavily on them for environmental work even as the budget for that work has been whittled. Experts say the process is flawed, incentivizing shortcuts and outsourcing to save money and preserve the Pentagon's primary military mission. But unless the Pentagon substantially tightens oversight to weed out problem contractors, experts say, the Defense Department's enormous environmental cleanup program — an effort affecting an amount of land larger than the state of Florida — will only become more vulnerable to abuse.

"It's about priorities; you either pay for a certain result or you end up playing hide the ball," said William Frank, who for 25 years oversaw Pentagon cleanups at the EPA as a senior attorney in the Federal Facilities Enforcement Office. "The DoD is not accountable and it hasn't been. But they are complicit. The process itself has this fatal flaw of the necessity of balancing the military warfighter mission and the weapons development industry versus their legal liability" under environmental law. "And it's not working."



Residents of Doyline, Louisiana were evacuated in 2012 out of fears that millions of pounds of discarded explosives left on the grounds of a former nearby Army plant at Camp Minden, might explode. A contracting firm was hired by the Army to recycle old munitions, but instead stored them in cardboard boxes, leading to an earlier massive explosion.

WHEN THE EPA'S David Robertson showed up at Barksdale in August 2016, it appears he was there to do nothing more than a pro-forma inspection. It didn't take Robertson long, however, to figure out the deal U.S. Technology offered the base was less than advertised, and maybe even a complete sham.

His inspection report shows that thousands of pounds of waste from Barksdale hadn't been shipped to the company's plant in Ohio, as a Barksdale official initially had said. Instead, shipping documents suggested that much of the waste had been trucked to warehouses in Arkansas and Georgia. There was no paperwork whatsoever for more than a year, from July 2014 until February 2016. And then there were the 55-gallon drums full of bead blast powder on the base itself — labeled "exempt," and not as hazardous. Some of the grayish powder was loose, sprinkled across the tops of the drums.

for EPA waste inspectors is to examine every link in the chain of custody before they sign off on a site. Robertson — seeking to verify the explanations offered by Barksdale staff — called regulators in Georgia and Arkansas and told them about the manifests indicating Barksdale waste had been shipped into their states. The Arkansas regulators, according to what Robertson wrote in his inspection report, told him they knew nothing about the shipments or about warehouses storing waste. [Donate](#)

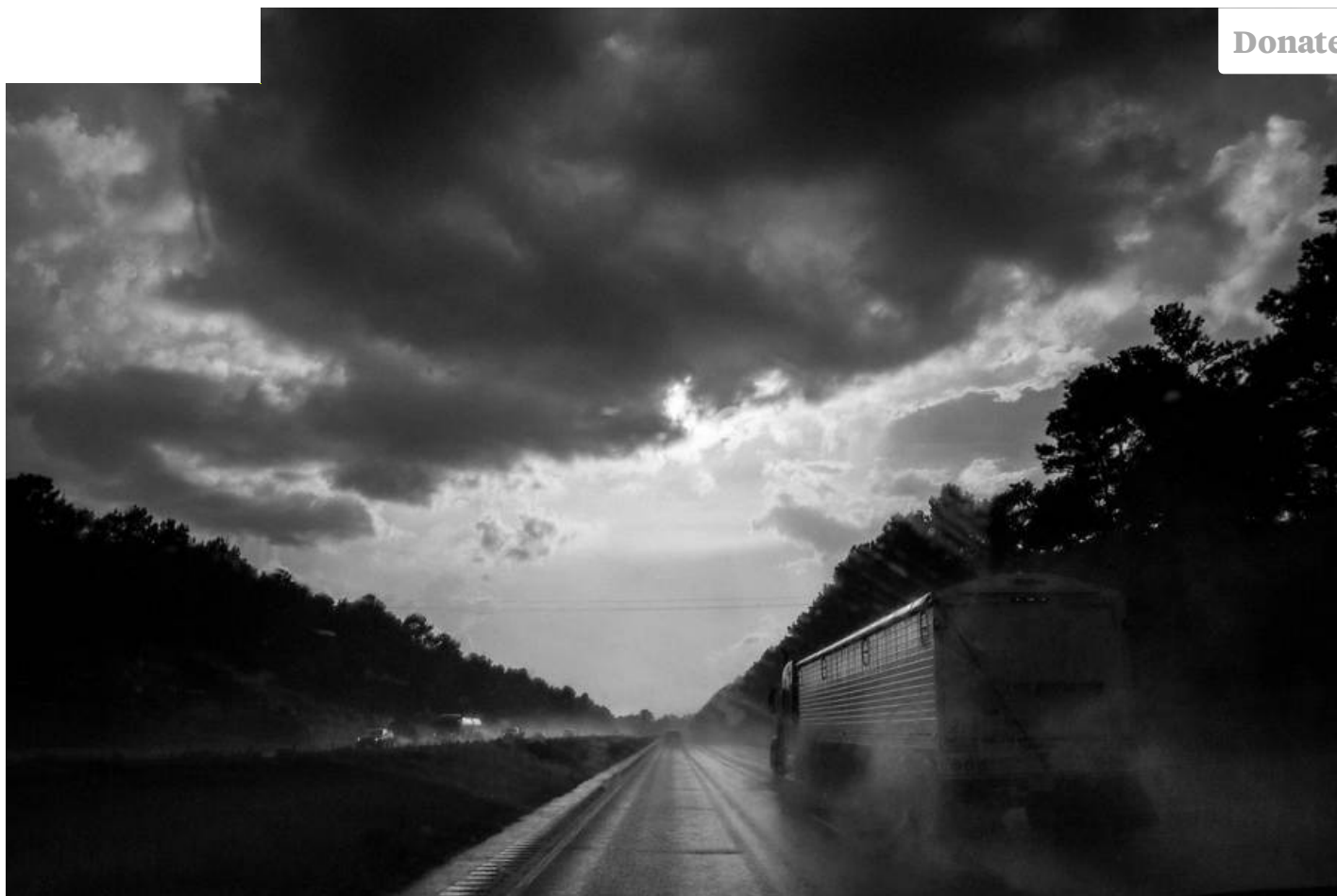
An EPA official in Georgia, however, was alarmed by the call from Robertson. He alerted Robertson to U.S. Technology's past legal troubles in Mississippi, and said he'd already been investigating U.S. Technology's facility in Macon for dumping hazardous waste nearly identical to what Barksdale had produced — and shipped to Macon in 2016 — on the grounds of an old track, called the Middle Georgia Raceway.

The track, which once hosted NASCAR races, hasn't been used for more than auto shows and test driving events since the 1980s, but the community surrounding it has slowly encroached, turning the once-rural and industrial area into a tightly packed nest of suburban streets and family homes.

According to EPA documents from Georgia, one of U.S. Technology's affiliated companies, U.S. Technology Aerospace Engineering, loaded the waste into dumpsters and trucked it to the raceway, where it was spread over several access roads and stashed in barrels lined up as an impact barrier for drivers on the oval. The EPA report does not say directly whether investigators determined the waste came from Barksdale, but it is described as bead-blast waste from the sandblasting of machinery. They found gray piles of loose, dusty material less than 90 feet from people's backyards.

In June 2016, the EPA sent an environmental contracting firm out to the track to sample the soils. Lab reports show the company found significant levels of chromium, arsenic, lead and cadmium. Only the arsenic exceeded health limits when measured for an industrial area — which the racetrack is zoned as. But the levels of chromium, lead and cadmium would all be considered much more dangerous if judged by residential health standards. By that measure, the Middle Georgia Raceway contained arsenic at 28 times the EPA's limit, and cadmium at nearly four times what would be considered safe. High levels of chromium were also present, but there is no federal screening standard.

Robertson makes clear in his report on Barksdale that he suspected both the Air Force and U.S. Technology of what the EPA calls "sham recycling." The EPA would not comment on the status of its investigation, but its documents show it has assigned an agency criminal investigator and criminal counsel to the case.



For years the Pentagon has increased its reliance on third party private firms to conduct environmental cleanup and hazardous waste disposal at U.S. Defense properties, despite repeated warnings from watchdogs that such contracts are ripe for abuse. More than 2,000 sites in ProPublica's database employ contracting firms for cleanups.

The Georgia dumping — which EPA is investigating separately — suggests a potentially larger problem with U.S. Technology.

The company appeared, once again, to be having difficulty turning its powder waste into viable products. According to John Socotch, the company's long-time director of sales, the market for U.S. Technology's powder dried up when the construction industry tanked in 2008 and it never fully recovered.

"Ray had to continually find other means, other companies to recycle the material," Socotch said of the company's owner in an interview with ProPublica. He said the company tried selling military waste for brick facades and to glass companies, in order "to get rid of the material."

In Georgia, the raceway's owner, a local real estate developer who also owns the building in Macon that served as U.S. Technology's warehouse, told ProPublica that Williams personally appealed to him to dump the waste. "They were asking me about potential sources to get rid of the stuff, because it just accumulates in the warehouse," said Tim Thornton. Thornton said Williams promised him the material wasn't hazardous.

not return repeated phone calls from ProPublica, and his lawyer declined comment. According to Socotch, Williams sold the company's patents, contracts and processes in April 2015 to an Ohio businessman named Anthony Giancola. Giancola's office did not return repeated calls for comment, but arranged for Socotch to speak with ProPublica.

The sale of the company has not distanced Williams from criminal cases related to its military contracts. In June, he was indicted in a U.S. District Court in Georgia on charges of paying a Department of Defense official \$20,000 a year to tailor contracts at Robins Air Force base so that only U.S. Technology's bead blasting and recycling services could satisfy them. According to the 84 counts in the indictment, between 2004 and 2013 Williams allegedly conspired with the officer, Mark Cundiff, on contracts large and small, including a \$25 million supply contract for U.S. bases and NATO members to purchase blasting materials. Cundiff has pleaded guilty in the case.

In a separate case, Missouri officials indicted Williams and U.S. Technology Corp. in April 2017 on charges of conspiracy to illegally dispose of hazardous waste. After the Hydromex case in Mississippi, U.S. Technology acquired Hydromex and Williams promised to properly recycle the material that had been dumped in Yazoo. Instead, in 2013, Missouri officials determined that U.S. Technology had trucked the material — 9 million pounds of it — over the state border and deposited it in a U.S. Technology warehouse in Berger, Mo. Williams has pleaded not guilty in that case.

Today, U.S. Technology Corp. has reconstituted itself under new leadership, and a slightly revised name.

In April 2015, U.S. Technology Corp. fired all of its employees, according to Socotch. The next day the new owner, who had purchased the patented products and the recycling process from Williams, hired everyone back — including Socotch, the long-time sales director. The company is now called U.S. Technology Media, and is located in one of Williams' old recycling buildings.

"We're trying to get people to understand we are not that guy," Socotch said of Williams. "We are not that company."

The Pentagon, it seems, is already persuaded.

Between April 2015 and June 2017, the Pentagon awarded 62 contracts to the new company, worth more than \$1.9 million. Barksdale officials continued to deal with the new company — and shipped more of its waste to it — in 2016. In late July, after EPA officials sent federal agencies a letter warning them that U.S. Technology was under investigation, and the Pentagon banned U.S. Technology Corp. — the old company — from any new government

them to a list of forbidden companies. Contracts with the new comp **Donate**

can allow.

Back at Barksdale, records show that the Air Force has promised the EPA it will now handle its waste on its own, registering its barrels of contaminated powder in federal and state hazardous waste databases and likely shipping them to the licensed disposal facility in Kentucky. It says it will no longer work with U.S. Technology Media.



B-52 Stratofortress bombers have flown historic combat missions from Barksdale Air Force base in Louisiana, including the first attack on Baghdad during the first Gulf War. More recently, Barksdale planes have bombed ISIS targets in Syria.

That, of course, leaves the question of what ever happened to decades worth of hazardous materials Williams and U.S. Technology removed from American military installations. Socotch says much of it was properly recycled, but he declined to say how much or to document the effort.

It appears that neither the company nor the Air Force plans to take responsibility for the unprocessed waste. Whatever hazardous waste U.S. Technology had accumulated in its warehouses, Socotch said, is still owned by U.S. Technology Corp., Williams' apparently now-defunct company.

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for the new company, because the new company started fresh,” Soco
“I don’t know what the old company continues to do to get rid of recycled material.”

Help us Investigate: *If you have experience with or information about the military’s use of contractors and environmental cleanups, email Abrahm.Lustgarten@propublica.org. For additional coverage, see more from ProPublica’s [Bombs in Our Backyard](#) series.*



[Abrahm Lustgarten](#) is a senior environmental reporter, with a focus at the intersection of business, climate and energy.

Nina Hedevang, Razi Syed, Alex Gonzalez, Lauren Gurley, Clare Victoria Church, Alessandra Freitas, Emma Cillekens and Eli Kurland, students in the NYU Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute graduate studies program, have contributed reporting for the Bombs in Our Backyard project.

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Report: Sand miners disturbing threatened West Texas lizard's habitat

An advocacy group's analysis predicts nearly 10 percent of the dunes sagebrush lizard's habitat could be disturbed or destroyed by sand mining operations.

BY **SHANNON NAJMABADI** SEPT. 25, 2017 14 HOURS AGO



 Steve Jurvetson

Sand mining operations in oil-rich West Texas have disturbed at least 292 acres of a threatened lizard's habitat this year — and could impact up to 23,000 acres, according to an advocacy group's analysis published Monday.

The dunes sagebrush lizard, a vulnerable species that calls the Permian Basin home, has long faced threats to its habitat from oil and drilling operations. Companies that mine fine-grain sand for hydraulic fracturing pose an additional threat, especially because several operations have been planned along a stretch of West Texas land considered a prime habitat for the lizard.

Last month, Texas' endangered species chief said these "frac-sand" operations posed a "significant" risk to a plan meant to protect the lizard and the 248,686 acres it lives on. In an August letter to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the official noted that five frac-sand companies had disturbed more than 271 acres of the lizard's habitat and surrounding buffer areas between early-March and mid-July. Several companies have agreed to modify their plans.

Now, the advocacy group Defenders of Wildlife has identified nine sand-mining operations that broke ground earlier this year and disturbed almost 300 acres of the lizard's habitat and surrounding buffer areas between February and August. The group also used the nine sand mines' lease information to predict that over 23,000 acres, or 9.5 percent, of the lizard's habitat and buffer zones could eventually be disturbed or destroyed.

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"If it is fully developed it would become a real problem for the lizard," said Ya-Wei Li, director of the group's Center for Conservation Innovation. In a statement, he said, "Unfortunately, if the sand mining companies do not refrain from developing in lizard habitat, we might see the extirpation of the Texas populations in the near future."

In 2012, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service declined to list the dunes sagebrush lizard under the Endangered Species Act, after the state comptroller's office finalized a voluntary plan meant to protect the lizard and conserve its habitat.

But that plan has been criticized by environmental groups, who have argued it doesn't adequately protect the lizard, in part because it relies on voluntary compliance.

Lauren Willis, a spokesperson for Comptroller [Glenn Hegar](#), said it's an important issue that is being taken seriously but that companies never mine boundary to boundary. In addition, "a typical sand mine only mines about 70 to 100 acres a year," Willis said. "It would take close to 300 years to mine 23,000 acres."

Todd Staples, president of the Texas Oil and Gas Association, said in a statement that oil and gas operators "have been meeting with the sand mining industry regularly since it learned of this new Permian Basin activity" and "have urged sand miners to minimize or avoid impact to [the lizard's] habitat."

"Those discussions are active and ongoing, and we are confident the sand miners can" find a way to allow "the region's new economic activity to occur" and protect the lizard on a long-term basis.

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The Defenders of Wildlife group used satellite data and cloud computing for its analysis, and Li said satellite images of the nine sand mines, and new ones that break ground, would be distributed online each month. "We have, in something like real-time, the ability to track the footprint of every one of these projects and then help hold those companies accountable if they're going to destroy lizard habitats."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Department did not immediately provide a comment Monday.

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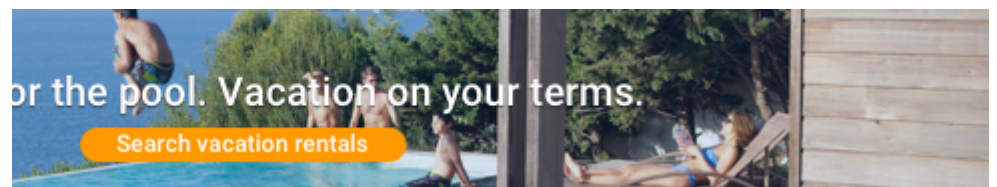
- The state's endangered species chief says a plan to protect the dunes sagebrush lizard is facing a "significant threat" from companies that mine the fine-grain sand that oil producers use for hydraulic fracturing. [\[Full story\]](#)
- Congressmen Lamar Smith and Randy Weber wrote a letter to the U.S. Department of Treasury alleging that American environmental groups are being funded by Russia. Critics say the Texas Republicans are trying to divert attention from President Trump's Russia problems. [\[Full story\]](#)
- As the glow from Permian Basin work sites hinders research and amateur stargazing at the McDonald Observatory in far West Texas, some companies are calling on their colleagues to address the problem. [\[Full story\]](#)

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City, state officials spar over funding Harvey recovery efforts at Houston meeting

While several Texas officials have thrown support behind some expensive flood control projects, a Houston City Council meeting Monday highlighted the political and financial hurdles that may await such efforts.

BY **BRANDON FORMBY** SEPT. 25, 2017 10 HOURS AGO



Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner listens to State Sen. Paul Bettencourt, R-Houston, during a Sept. 25, 2017 public hearing on a proposed property tax rate increase that aims to cover city costs for Hurricane Harvey recovery efforts.

Brandon Formby

HOUSTON — With mountains of debris sitting in front yards and tens of thousands of

southeast Texans still in the early stages of re-establishing their lives after Hurricane Harvey's destructive rainfall, city and state officials sparred Monday over who should cover which recovery costs — and when those funds should be disbursed.

While city and state officials in the weeks immediately following Harvey's historic rainfall threw verbal support behind building and upgrading massive flood control projects and learning from past development mistakes, a Houston City Council meeting Monday foreshadowed the political and financial tensions that could complicate such efforts.

The politically charged debates between State Sen. [Paul Bettencourt](#) and the Houston City Council came during the first public hearing over Mayor Sylvester Turner's proposal to raise property taxes for one year to help with some emergency costs. The council will vote on the matter next month.

Bettencourt, R-Houston, and some residents portrayed the proposal as insensitive to the financial woes facing homeowners and renters grappling with the costs of repairing houses, [finding new places to live](#), [replacing vehicles](#) and refurnishing their homes.

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"I don't think we should be kicking Houstonians while they're down," Bettencourt said to applause from residents.

But Turner and other council members said the hike wouldn't be necessary if [state officials would provide certainty](#) on how and when they plan to tap Texas' savings account to contribute to relief efforts. Council member Dwight Boykins chastised Bettencourt and other Houston-area legislators for not lobbying Gov. [Greg Abbott](#) harder on the region's behalf.

"That's what I expect — not us fighting against you," Boykins said.

State officials have said they plan to tap the state's savings account, known as the Rainy Day Fund, but want to learn more about the full scope of what's needed for the wide swath of southeast Texas battered by the worst rainfall in U.S. history.

Bettencourt said the state funds could go toward a new reservoir in western Houston, upgrades to two existing reservoirs and a [physical storm surge barrier often referred to as a "coastal spine."](#) Together, those projects will cost well over \$10 billion and will likely require contributions from several layers of government.

Council member Brenda Stardig indicated support for the city funding some relief efforts now if the state was going to make substantial contributions to large-scale flood control projects later. Many of those projects have been discussed for years but gained little political or financial support.

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“Imagine the homes that might have been saved if we had taken action then,” Stardig said.

Turner, though, failed to get Bettencourt's commitment to financially support such projects on Monday.

Bettencourt urged the council to tap tens of millions of dollars in money from special taxing districts within the city to help cover costs. He also claimed the state had already sent the city \$100 million, a statement that drew immediate ire from Turner who said the Federal Emergency Management Agency provided that money.

Bettencourt also suggested the city should have damaged properties reappraised so landowners aren't paying taxes on assessed values that no longer reflect the state of what they own. A spokesman for the mayor late Monday questioned when there would be time for that since tax bills are set to go out in late November.

Bettencourt drew claps and verbal signals of agreement throughout his discussion with the council. And many residents also opposed the proposed property tax hike when they spoke Monday. Mindy Smith told council members her city property taxes have increased 18 percent in the past five years. She said there are plenty of unnecessary city expenses that could be clipped from the budget to help fund recovery costs.

“How about you cut some of that before you come and ask me to cut my family's budget?” she said.

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THE LEADER IN ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT NEWS

EPA**Team to examine how agency 'engages with industry'**

Maxine Joselow, E&E News reporter

Published: Monday, September 25, 2017

U.S. EPA announced the formation of a Smart Sectors team as part of a planned restructuring for its policy office.

The Smart Sectors team within the Office of Policy is set to "re-examine how EPA engages with industry," according to a *Federal Register* [notice](#) posted Friday.

The goal of the team is to "reduce unnecessary regulatory burden, create certainty and predictability, and improve the ability of both EPA and industry to conduct long-term regulatory planning while also protecting the environment and public health," according to the notice.

Samantha Davis, top policy aide to EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, previously hinted at the Smart Sectors team in an internal [email](#) obtained by E&E News ([Greenwire](#), Sept. 7).

"The Sectors Team will develop strategies that better protect human health and the environment by engaging with partners at all levels to ensure the agency puts forth sensible regulations that encourage economic growth," Davis said in the email.

"This team will coordinate with stakeholders to better understand their needs and challenges so as to improve environmental performance and inform smarter and more predictable rulemaking," she said.

While Davis has promoted the policy office's restructuring as a way to boost the agency's efficiency, some critics have derided the effort as politically motivated.

Karl Brooks, who was acting chief of EPA's Office of Administration and Resources Management during the Obama administration, said he's keeping a close eye on whether the agency's reorganization effort is driven by political appointees.

"Personnel often makes policy," said Brooks, also a former EPA Region 7 administrator. "So if the administration shares a list of team members, I'd want to look at it really carefully."

He added, "Almost any time I see the word 'smart,' I'm always a little bit on alert. ... Sometimes when people use 'smart' when they're looking at regulation, what they're really talking about is less enforcement of the laws and less environmental protection."

James Goodwin, senior policy analyst with the Center for Progressive Reform, decried the Smart Sectors team as a means of giving industry even more input in the rulemaking process.

"The idea that we need to create yet another avenue for industry to express its views or concerns about regulations is bananas," Goodwin said.

"The whole regulatory process, from beginning to end, offers several opportunities for public participation, which industry not only avails itself of, but overwhelmingly dominates to the exclusion of public interests," he said.

The reorganization is set to occur Oct. 1, the start of the next fiscal year.

Twitter: [@maxinejoselow](#) | Email: mjoselow@eenews.net

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THE LEADER IN ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT NEWS

AIR POLLUTION**EPA sends ozone implementation rule to White House**

Sean Reilly, E&E News reporter

Published: Monday, September 25, 2017

With U.S. EPA nearing a key compliance deadline for its 2015 ground-level ozone standard, the agency has sent a related regulation to the White House Office of Management and Budget for review, according to the [Reginfo.gov](http://www.epa.gov) site.

The site describes the regulation as both a "proposed rule" and a "final action" that will "establish the air quality thresholds that define the classifications assigned to all nonattainment areas" for the 2015 standard.

EPA had proposed an implementation rule last November; agency staffers could not immediately be reached for comment this morning on the extent to which the current regulation is related to last year's proposal. But Janice Nolen, assistant vice president for national policy at the American Lung Association, said in an interview that the regulation is more related to attainment designations than to implementation, adding that it would set the thresholds to define where nonattainment areas fall on a sliding EPA scale that now ranges from "marginal" to "extreme" and how long they accordingly have to clean up.

"It's the framework for putting together the plans that will allow them to meet the standard," Nolen said.

EPA sent the regulation to OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs last Thursday, the [Reginfo.gov](http://www.epa.gov) site indicates.

Ozone, a lung irritant that is the main ingredient in smog, is linked to asthma attacks in children and worsened breathing problems for people with emphysema and other chronic respiratory diseases.

Under the Obama administration, EPA tightened the ozone standard in October 2015 from 75 parts per billion to 70 ppb, citing Clean Air Act requirements to protect public health in light of research showing that ozone is harmful at lower levels than previously thought. As a first step in the implementation process, states sent their attainment recommendations to EPA last fall; under a standard timetable, the agency is supposed to make final determinations by this Sunday, Oct. 1.

In June, however, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt ordered a blanket one-year extension for those decisions until October 2018, citing the need for more information. Pruitt then reversed that decision last month, but in a recent report, EPA officials left open the possibility of providing "additional relief" ([Greenwire](#), Aug. 25). The attainment designations are key to implementation of the tighter ozone standard because they start the clock for out-of-compliance areas to come up with cleanup plans.

Meanwhile, a coalition of public health and environmental groups — later joined by 15 states and the District of Columbia — filed suit in July with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to block the initial blanket delay in attainment designations. While EPA attorneys have asked the court to dismiss the litigation as moot in light of Pruitt's reversal, the plaintiffs are seeking to keep it alive on the grounds that EPA could again attempt a postponement ([Greenwire](#), Aug. 15).

As of this morning, the court had not ruled. John Walke, clean air director for the Natural Resources Defense Council, which is among the plaintiffs, said in an interview today that the court may be waiting to see what happens by Oct. 1.

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Multiple challenges remain to Fukushima nuclear cleanup

MARI YAMAGUCHI, ASSOCIATED PRESS | September 26, 2017 | Updated: September 26, 2017 6:09am

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Photo: Daisuke Suzuki, AP

IMAGE 1 OF 4

This Sept. 4, 2017 aerial photo shows Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant reactors, from bottom at right, Unit 1, Unit 2 and Unit 3, in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, northeastern Japan. The three reactors ... [more](#)

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's government approved a revised road map Tuesday to clean up the radioactive mess left at the Fukushima nuclear power plant after it was damaged beyond repair by an earthquake and tsunami in 2011. Decommissioning the damaged reactors is an uncertain process that is expected to take 30 to 40 years.



A look at some of the challenges:

THE FUEL RODS

The three reactors that had meltdowns together have 1,573 units of mostly used nuclear fuel rods that are still inside and must be kept cool in pools of water. They are considered among the highest risks in the event of another major earthquake that could trigger fuel rods to melt and release massive radiation due to loss of water from sloshing or structural damage because the pool is dry or too small. The plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., says it plans to begin moving the rods from reactor Unit 3 in the fiscal year beginning April 1.

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However, the latest road map delays removal of the rods from units 1 and 2 for three years until fiscal 2023, because further decontamination work and additional safety measures are needed. Ironically, because the building housing reactor 3 was more heavily damaged, it is easier to remove that unit's fuel rods. The fuel rods will be moved to a storage pool outside the reactors, and eventually sent for long-term storage in what are known as dry casks.

THE MELTED FUEL

By far the hardest part of decommissioning Fukushima will be removing the fuel that melted and presumably spilled out of the reactor cores. In July, an underwater robot for the first time captured images inside the primary containment chamber of Unit 3. They showed a large number of solidified lava-like rocks and lumps on the chamber's floor, believed to be melted fuel mixed with melted and mangled equipment and parts of the structure.

TRANSLATOR

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Relatives: Toddler who fatally shot father has asked for him

The search for melted fuel in units 1 and 2 has so far been unsuccessful. The water level is lower, so crawling robots have been tried, but they have been obstructed by debris as well as extremely high radiation levels. Despite the unknowns about the melted fuel and debris and their whereabouts, the road map calls for finalizing the removal method in 2019, and starting actual removal at one of the reactors in 2021. The government-funded International Research Institute for Nuclear Decommissioning is developing robots and other technology to carry out the work.

CONTAMINATED WATER

TEPCO has treated and stored a massive amount of radioactive water — about 800,000 tons — and the volume is growing every day. Cooling water leaks out of the damaged reactors and mixes with groundwater that seeps into the basements of the reactor building, increasing the amount of contaminated water. The utility has managed to halve the volume to 200 tons per day by pumping up groundwater via dozens of wells dug upstream from the reactors, as well as installing a costly "ice wall" by freezing the ground to block some of the water from coming in and going out.

The water is stored in hundreds of tanks that cover much of the plant property. They get in the way of decommissioning work and pose another risk if they were to spill out their contents in another major earthquake or tsunami. After treatment, the water still contains radioactive tritium, which cannot be removed but is not considered harmful in small amounts. Experts say controlled release of the water into the ocean is the only realistic option, but TEPCO has not moved forward with that plan because of opposition from fishermen and residents who fear a negative image and possible health impact.

RADIOACTIVE WASTE

Japan has yet to develop a plan to dispose of the highly radioactive waste that will come out of the Fukushima reactors. Under the road map, the government and TEPCO will compile a basic plan during fiscal 2018. Managing the waste will require new technologies to compact it and reduce its toxicity. Finding a storage site for the waste seems virtually impossible, as the government has not been able to find a site even for the normal radioactive waste from its nuclear power plants. The prospect raises doubts about whether the cleanup can really be completed within 40 years.

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Opinion

http://www.postandcourier.com/opinion/commentary/infrastructure-can-t-wait/article_afaa6598-a221-11e7-8fab-1b777af93db4.html

Infrastructure can't wait

BY JOHN O'GRADY 10 hrs ago

We are at the height of hurricane season as South Carolinians well know. After Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, the United States must not only help our sisters and brothers in Texas and Florida, but as a nation, become better prepared for future natural disasters.

That means preventing the many factors that have contributed to certain storm intensity of hurricanes and regional flooding, plus mitigating the impacts from climate change, rising seas, and several decades of unchecked urban sprawl leading to a host of environmental, economic, and social concerns. That also means investing in and strengthening America's infrastructure.

If our president is determined to "make America great again," we must first start repairing our failing infrastructure. I do not mean the administration's narrow list of campaign applause-lines and temporary construction jobs like an alleged border wall and gas and oil pipelines that promise greater risk than reward to the American people. Rather, I am referring to a holistic infrastructure plan that is the backbone of the U.S. economy, including South Carolina's bridges, drinking water, dams, navigable waterways, railways, airports, highways, public transit and wastewater treatment.

Industries and companies of all sizes in South Carolina are risking everyone's safety by relying on the current state of America's failing bridges, damaged drinking water plants, roads and tunnels in need of repair, and deteriorating wastewater treatment plants.

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) reports on America's crumbling foundation and the 2017 analysis says taxpayers have been paying far less than half of the costs for decades, and continue to fail to close that gap. They recommend that Congress and the states "invest an additional \$206 billion each year to prevent the economic consequences to families, business, and the economy."

Just how bad is it? According to the ASCE's 2017 Infrastructure Report Card, America's cumulative GPA is once again a D+. The ASCE's report for South Carolina is not yet ready. However, of South Carolina's 964 bridges, 10.3 percent are structurally deficient.

There are 178 high hazard potential dams in South Carolina. In addition, the state has \$1.8 billion in drinking water infrastructure needs over the next 20 years. Sixteen percent of South Carolina's 76,250 miles of public roads are in poor condition, costing motorists \$502 per year in additional repair costs. The state also has 16 hazardous waste sites on the Superfund National Priorities List.

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Yet, despite these abysmal grades, this administration's proposed 2018 federal budget continues to be insufficient for the nation's infrastructure needs. Safer infrastructure takes money. There are no shortcuts. Despite conventional wisdom, the states alone cannot afford the long-overdue repair costs.

The 2018 Federal budget must properly fund and staff the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, particularly its Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund (SRF), which finances infrastructure investment in wastewater, and has over \$271 billion in identified needs over the next 20 years. Similarly, the U.S. EPA's budget for the drinking water SRF needs \$384 billion to be adequately funded.

The government must address infrastructure in a meaningful and bipartisan way. There is broad voter support for not only maintaining, but increasing federal spending across a variety of program areas.

Fifty-eight percent of all Americans want more spending on rebuilding America's bridges, highways, and roads (that's up 20 points from 2013).

Funding infrastructure now will put more Americans back to work and provide much needed improvements to our crumbling and worn foundation.

Please act now, Mr. President, or you may be liable for making South Carolina, and all of America fail.

John O'Grady is president of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) National Council of EPA Locals #238 representing over 9,000 bargaining unit employees at the U.S. EPA.

LOUISIANA ENVIRONMENT AND FLOOD CONTROL

Planner chosen for Isle de Jean Charles resettlement site

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Updated on September 26, 2017 at 6:05 AM
Posted on September 26, 2017 at 6:00 AM



Isle de Jean Charles - or what's left of it - is a small enclave of houses on a narrow, one-and-a-half mile long strip of land. As south Louisiana wetlands continue to sink and as sea levels continue to rise, the island has become a vulnerable environmental outpost ringed by a low levee. (Photo by Ted Jackson, Nola.com | The Times-Picayune)

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By **Tristan Baurick**, tbaurick@nola.com,
NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune

A Baton Rouge firm has been selected for the unique task of designing a community to replace one that's sinking under the sea.

Louisiana's Office of Community Development hired architecture and engineering firm CSRS Inc. to develop plans for the resettlement of Isle de Jean Charles, a small island in Terrebonne Parish that gets smaller every year.

CSRS will design homes for the island's nearly 100 residents, and possibly shared facilities for education and job training. Two sites near Houma, about 40 miles north of the island, are under consideration for the new community. The one preferred by many residents is a 515-acre sugar farm valued at \$19 million.

Last year, Isle de Jean Charles became the first community in the U.S. to receive federal assistance for a large-scale retreat from the impacts of climate change. The Office of Community Development was granted \$48.3 million to purchase land, build homes and move residents willing to relocate to the new community.

A spokeswoman for the office could not give specifics about how much would be spent on design and planning, or when CSRS is expected to complete its work. Payment to CSRS and other contract specifics have not been finalized, she said.

CSRS has managed development projects for Louisiana State University, several Louisiana community colleges, and New Orleans and Baton Rouge school districts. The 39-year-old firm has a "firm understanding" of how to address the housing, employment, education and job training needs of the island's residents, state officials said in a statement.

Many of island's remaining residents are members of a small band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Indians. According to surveys conducted by the state, residents prefer a resettlement site in rural Terrebonne that's well outside a town but closer than they are now to grocery stores, schools, doctors, and other services. Most residents strongly prefer a place safe from flooding and storm damage.

The island has lost 98 percent of its area over the last 60 years due to a combination factors, including subsidence, erosion and Mississippi River levees, which cut the coast off from replenishing river sediment. Sea level rise triggered by climate change is expected to swallow up the island in the coming years. Recent storms have hit the island hard, and high tides and southern winds routinely flood the island's main road. Only about 35 homes - many of them abandoned - and 32 fishing camps remain.

*Tristan Baurick covers Louisiana's coastal environment for NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune. Email: tbaurick@nola.com * Twitter: [@tristanbaurick](https://twitter.com/tristanbaurick) * Facebook: [Tristan Baurick](#) and [Louisiana Coastal Watch](#).*

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State committee discusses chromium plume cleanup

By Tris DeRoma

Monday, September 25, 2017 at 10:09 am

A state legislative committee met with Los Alamos National Laboratory officials in Los Alamos Thursday, focusing mainly on cleaning up a decades-old hazardous waste spill on lab property.



TRIS DeROMA/Monitor

Sen. Jeff Steinborn, D-Doña Ana, chair of the State Legislative Radioactive and Hazardous Materials Committee said at the meeting Thursday in Los Alamos the committee will likely ask the federal government for additional funding to clean up the chromium plume at Mortandad Canyon.

The legislators were members of the Radioactive and Hazardous Materials Committee.

The lab is treating the ground plume, which is on an aquifer below Mortandad Canyon that is part of a regional aquifer used by Los Alamos Santa Fe and other communities.

The plume is 1,000 feet below the ground, and some has made its way into the regional aquifer below.

LANL discovered the plume in 2005, and has been installing a series of wells to define where the boundaries of the plume are, so it can be stopped and the area inside the well boundary cleaned or rendered harmless to the environment.

The chromium 6 was used as a corrosion inhibitor at a LANL power plant from the mid-'50s to the early '70s. The chromium was regularly flushed out into the canyons. There is approximately 160,000 pounds of chromium in the plume.

Officials believe the plume is about 20 to 50 feet deep, and a mile long by a half a mile wide.

In a presentation to the committee, Doug Hintze, manager of the Environmental Management Los Alamos Field Office, disputed recent newspaper reports that the plume was spreading and growing in size.

Since 2004, LANL has taken measures to halt the chromium spill, which is located in an aquifer 900 to 1,000 feet below

Mortandad Canyon. Contractors for the lab have been installing a network of injection and monitoring wells within the plume and around its projected boundary to keep it from spreading into nearby San Ildefonso Pueblo and elsewhere.

The new data shows seven samples taken at the well over a two-day period in July were higher than expected. Levels of chromium ranged from 247.24 ug/L to 259 ug/L. ug/L is a unit of density, micrograms per liter. "1" ug/L means "one part per billion." The EPA defines a part in this case as one drop of water in a billion drops of water, about what an average swimming pool contains. The acceptable state limit for chromium is 50 parts per billion. Measurements taken at the plume have

ranged as high as 1,000 parts per billion.

Contractors for EM sampled a newly drilled well in July, expecting to see a low amount of chromium in the sample. Instead the sample showed chromium 6 levels five-times higher than levels allowed by the state.

"We did not do a good job in all of our discussions over the last couple of years to explain what folks would see on the maps that were modeled based on assumptions using the limited data that we have," Hintze said. "This latest well that we drilled gave us more data."

Sen. Carlos Cisneros wanted to know if any of the drinking water sources on San Ildefonso Pueblo were contaminated by the chromium plume. Hintze said the plume is still some distance from pueblo boundary, and that there is a large amount of hunting land starting from the pueblo boundary to the first drinking well on the pueblo. He also told Cisneros that no drinking water wells in Los Alamos County have been contaminated.

Cisneros also wanted to know how frequently the wells on the pueblo and Los Alamos County are tested for contamination.

"It's continuous from a multitude of organizations," Hintze said. He added that sampling is done at various times by Environmental Management the New Mexico Environment Department San Ildefonso Pueblo and Los Alamos County does sampling.

Rep. Carl Trujillo, D-46, wanted to know if the EM Office had enough federal funding devote to cleaning and stopping the spread of the plume before it damaged any water sources.

Hintze said that they receive no extra funding to remediate the plume, that it is included in their annual budget, which is \$194 million every year.

Sen. Jeff Steinborn (D-36), chairman of the committee, said they will be recommending to their congressional delegation more funding for the Los Alamos EM Office to help remediate the plume more quickly.

“Because of the focus of the committee, we really wanted to key in on some of these environmental issues,” Steinborn said. “Clearly, the chromium issue is one the committee is concerned about, and feels needs more resources and need to be expanded to get our arms around the extent of this problem.”



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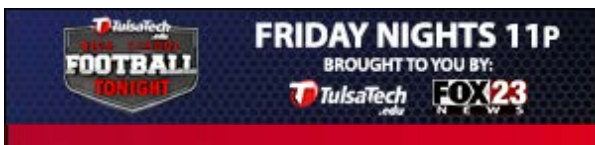
West Tulsa chemical spill unlikely to affect humans or wildlife

by: Jackie Delpilar, Ashli Lincoln Updated: Sep 25, 2017 - 6:34 PM



LIVE

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Monday morning.
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AZZ Galvanizing reported a chemical spill Monday morning.

The west Tulsa company reported a leak of sodium hydroxide, or lye, around 9 a.m.

The leak reportedly started around 3 a.m. when a 14,000 gallon tank of the sodium hydroxide was overfilled.

Tulsa Fire Department and HAZMAT responded to the scene as the chemical reached city storm drains, but they blocked off the drains and pumped them with water to dilute any chemicals that may have gotten into the drains. Firefighters say the chemical flowed northeast toward the Arkansas River, but the amount will have little to no impact on people or wildlife.


Stan May with the Tulsa Fire Department says they will continue to test the PH levels throughout the day, to make sure the chemical doesn't harm wildlife.

A clean-up crew sucked chemicals from the starting point to avoid additional issues.

Who is AZZ Galvanizing?

- AZZ Galvanizing has 50 locations across four continents.
- They are a metal coating and engraving company.
- According to the Environmental Protection Agency, AZZ Galvanizing has been in compliance for the last three years.
- They use chemicals like hydrochloric acid, lead, sodium hydroxide, sulfuric acid, zinc, and zinc compounds.
- Firefighters say the company uses sodium hydroxide to clean metal before they galvanize it. Galvanization is a process to add a coat or seal to metal to protect it and stop it from rusting.
- Since 1998, lead and zinc have been reported in greater releases.
- The EPA says recycling would prevent these types of releases.

Sodium hydroxide is a common household cleaner. It's not harmful to inhale or ingest, but it can discolor human skin or hair.



AZZ Galvanizing had no comment.

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Water loss accountability improved, treatment plants receive repairs

By JEFF MEEK / Voice correspondent

Posted at 12:01 AM

At the Sept. 21 meeting of the Hot Springs Village public works/public utilities meeting director Jason Temple informed members of some good news. Thanks to the leadership of chief water plant operator Chris Boutzale, public utility staff discovered a 6-inch water main located after the main meter for water entering the water distribution system that was previously unknown and recirculating back to the water plant's main water meter to read 4.4 percent (3,456,000 gallons) more finished water per month than was actually being delivered to the distribution system.

This is good news in that accounting for the water plant's recirculation, plus improved accounting of known water leaks, fire hydrant flushing and construction-related water usage, it has allowed the public utilities department to reduce its non-accounted for water loss by 18 percent. "That's huge," said an elated Temple.

To make further improvements the department will continue to improve the numbers by installing new distribution system water meters that measure water flow to a known zone and compare that water usage to the consumer's water meters. Temple added that areas where there are large discrepancies could mean the old meters need replacing or there are large water leaks that need to be found and repaired.

At the waste water treatment plants Temple said the plants have barely exceeded their permitting copper discharge limits a few times this year, so the department is working with the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality to raise or eliminate the copper levels allowed in the reclaimed water discharged into receiving streams, while also enhancing the copper removal during the reclamation process.

The copper levels are safe for human and livestock, but the plant purifies the reclaimed water to even lower and safer levels for downstream ecology at the microorganism level that are very low at 10.46 parts per billion (ppb). That

level is difficult to reach with the treatment plant technology and equipment currently being used.

Temple said it all starts with our drinking water. When it leaves the plant with a very low content, around six ppb, it then increases a bit as it flows through the system's brass and copper pipes. At the tap, the level is at 30 ppb which Temple said is a very safe level. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires public notification when the copper content in drinking water exceeds 1,330 ppb, thus HSV water, at 30 ppb, is at a very low level.

"That being said it appears unreasonable that while our drinking water is very safe, with an average copper content at 30 ppb, when it returns to our wastewater treatment plants the copper level has to be further reduced to a level lower than 10.46 ppb to be in compliance with our permit to discharge to the receiving streams," said Temple. "The public utilities department is pursuing more reasonable and obtainable copper limits in our reclaimed water discharges that is applicable to the water quality of our local specify receiving stream while simultaneously pursuing more ways to consistently meet our permit requirements."

Temple also noted several improvements taking place at the plants. At the Mill Creek plant a new fine screen at the headworks, new sludge pumps and a new walkway and hand railing are going in.

At Cedar Creek there is also a fine screen going in plus a new clarifier drive and effluent filter.

Public works director Bill Staggs gave his report saying the culvert rehab project will begin in a few weeks with the work being done by Krapffs-Reynolds of Oklahoma City. Staggs said the company has a good reputation. Crack sealing will also be done soon by Mitchell's Asphalt of Hot Springs and pavement marking by Arkansas Fence and Guardrail of Little Rock. Contracts for paving rehab are out but no one hired as of yet. Staggs said mowing on the dams has been delayed because crews are instead mowing roads at this time. Committee member Phil Matone gave a detailed talk on traffic counts the committee has done at DeSoto and Barcelona. He said the traffic numbers have increased on DeSoto, but are not close on Barcelona to warrant a four-way stop.

At Villena and DeSoto intersection Matone suggested the possibility of improved signage, flashing lights and/or tickets given by Village police to

speeders as a way to make the area safer.

The public works/utilities subcommittees meet again on Oct. 12 and the full committee on Oct. 19 at 9:30 a.m. at a location yet to be determined.



CROPS > SOYBEANS

Might dicamba be affecting pollinators?

Beekeepers among those claiming problems with dicamba-tolerant crops

David Bennett | Sep 26, 2017



Since Xtend crops have been planted in the Mid-South, the focus of off-target damage from dicamba has largely been on soybeans. But what about some of the damage to more peripheral, but no less vital, players in the agricultural chain?

Before getting to that, it's important to know that Richard Coy isn't a man afraid to take a stand for his farming partners. Coy, Vice President of Coy's Honey Farm, manages some 13,000 bee hives scattered throughout Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, and California. The family honey business is the largest in Arkansas.



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operating a large-scale farm,” Coy recently testified before the Arkansas Dicamba Task Force. “During my 26 years as a commercial beekeeper, I have developed and maintained good relationships with many of the agriculture industry leaders in Arkansas and throughout the nation. Within the past two years, I have written letters on behalf of cotton, and grain sorghum producers requesting Section 18’s for Transform. I recently met with EPA officials in Memphis, Tenn., and voiced my support for neonics as a seed treatment. Also, I have worked closely with the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Research and Extension along with various aspects of the USDA.”

Dicamba and bees

Coy says he first began noticing issues with increased dicamba use and its relationship with his hives in 2016.

“I was finally able to pinpoint it this year. But I began noticing the problem last year when my production was off in the area around (northeast Arkansas’) Monette and Leachville. That’s where the major controversy and shooting over dicamba took place in 2016.”

He didn’t know what the problem was and assumed it was weather-related or maybe involved an insecticide.

In 2017, “just like the past 10 years, we placed bees on our locations in Mississippi and Crittenden Counties. Production in these counties this year has been dramatically reduced.

“We began noticing lower than normal bee population the last week of June. The hives stopped building population and we could not understand what the problem might be. We looked at all of our management practices and found nothing out of the ordinary.”

beehives. “Pollen is the protein source for the hive. Without it, the queen will not lay eggs because there’s no protein to feed the larvae. That has a tipping effect that negatively impacts honey production.”

It takes 21 days for eggs to mature into adult bees. Therefore, “you don’t really notice what’s going on for a few weeks. There’s a lag time and so it was deep into July before we knew there was a major problem. Another reason it took so long to get a grip on this is we have about 13,000 hives and we run them about every three weeks.”

So, from middle to late July the Coys knew there was “a major problem. The hive-check rotation takes about three weeks since the hives are scattered all over the Delta. My younger brother, David, and I began going to different areas and really looking closely at the hives. We determined in areas without dicamba drift our honey production had not decreased. We dug deep into the hives and found we had a lot of pollen available in non-dicamba use areas and very little, to no, pollen stored where there were dicamba-tolerant crops.”

Research

Even without dicamba-tolerant crops, how would Coy describe this year for making honey?

“This year, the weather has been conducive for an average crop. We had too much rain in August to have an above-average crop.

“However, there are hives set up where apparently little dicamba was used because there are pigweeds in the fields and the vines also show no damage. The hives in those areas have average to above average production.

“When you’re trying to put together the pieces of a puzzle together it can take a

Around the last week of July, Richard and his brother “went to check our bee locations around Webb and Tutwiler, Miss. We run about 1,600 (hives) in that area. Chris said ‘We have some locations that have filled every box full. But, I have found an area where they haven’t made any honey since the first of July.’ He checked into it, and sure enough, where the honey production had stopped was also where the farmers had planted (dicamba-tolerant) soybeans.”

That spurred Richard to do some more research to “see if I was reading too much into the situation. Well, I found [a study from Penn State University](#) that shows where there is widespread dicamba use in an area there would be enough visible drift and volatility to damage all the vegetation. The study found it would decrease pollinator habitat by 50 percent and pollinator visits by 50 percent.”

At that point, in late July, Coy called the Arkansas Plant Board and explained what he’d found and had been seeing. “They sent out some inspectors a couple of weeks later and they took some pictures of the vegetation. They verified what I was seeing.”

Symptomology

What was Coy observing?

“In fencerows and ditches, vegetation like wild grape, red vine and even ragweed were damaged. All that unwanted vegetation for farming is something that bees use to make honey. Those plants had curled leaves and had stopped growing prior to the blooming process.

“I went south of I-40 to an area I know there hadn’t been a lot of dicamba sprayed. There was a bunch of the (aforementioned) plants that were growing and blooming and the bees had produced a tremendous honey crop.”

What are other beekeepers saying?

I've spoken with others in this region and they've been seeing the same symptoms in their hives where there are dicamba-tolerant crops and drift complaints are the highest. Healthy hives had stopped collecting nectar and pollen and the population hadn't grown enough to produce a good honey crop."

Cut-off date

What about the April 15 dicamba-spraying cutoff date urged by the task force?

"I think it's a good idea. If you look at all the data put out by university weed scientists it looks like there isn't an issue with dicamba and volatility until temperatures get hotter. Most of the vegetation our bees rely on isn't really up and going by mid-April. For example, red vine doesn't start putting on leaves until sometime in May.

"I think beekeepers would be happy to live with an April 15 cut-off."

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CROPS > SORGHUM

Mississippi sorghum yields shine; acreage and prices sag

Mississippi grain sorghum acreage is the lowest since record-keeping began in 1929.

Linda Breazeale | Sep 26, 2017

Mississippi's grain sorghum acreage is at an historic low, and market prices are not much better, but yields should be good.

Erick Larson, grain crops specialist with the Mississippi State University Extension Service, said that when market incentives went away after 2015, so did farmers' desire to plant grain sorghum. State growers may have planted 10,000 acres this year, the fewest since record-keeping began in 1929.

“Yields this year ought to be good, near the 89 bushels per acre level, and mirror what we are seeing in corn.”

Larson said sorghum can be a good option if farmers experience planting delays. They may choose it as a rotational crop with soybeans and cotton. Weed management could have been one reason to rotate it into fields this year to help combat glyphosate-resistant weeds.

“Sorghum is a tough, dryland crop that does well in dry conditions, but that wasn’t an issue this year,” he said. “The biggest complicating factor this year was rain the first weeks of August that may have caused some kernel sprouting. Sorghum seeds are small and exposed and often sprout if mature grain is exposed to prolonged rainy, humid weather before harvest.”

Sugarcane aphids

Extension entomologist Angus Catchot said growers have become accustomed to battling sugarcane aphids in grain sorghum, but that does not make it easy.

“Anywhere we had sorghum, we had aphids. We are understanding them better now and know how to deal with them,” Catchot said. “There is no question, left uncontrolled, sugarcane aphids can be catastrophic. They are going to be deep in the leaf canopy, so coverage is a challenge. Growers have to scout regularly for aphids specifically. Spraying for other pests, like sorghum midge, can hurt beneficial insects and cause aphid populations to spike.”

Catchot said farmers have learned a lot since sugarcane aphids arrived in 2013, but there is still much to learn.

“Growers have become accustomed to spraying several times to control the aphids, but they have to stay on top of them,” he said.

Don't expect acreage to bounce back unless there are some significant market incentives," he said.

Extension agricultural economist Brian Williams said sorghum prices have not changed much in the past year, and cash prices are running about \$3.05 per bushel.

"Prices were a little better a couple years ago when China was importing more sorghum from the U.S., and prices were actually better than corn at that time," Williams said.

"We already have extremely low acreage, but really no incentive to expand," he said. "I anticipate our acreage to stay steady to slightly lower. Any change will be small and market driven."

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CROP DAMAGE UNACCEPTABLE, SAYS SOY GROUP SEEKING PATH FORWARD ON DICAMBA

By [Chuck Abbott](#)

9/26/2017

The dicamba “issue” — widespread reports of crop damage from using the weedkiller — “isn’t going away. In fact, it’s only getting worse,” said Ron Moore, the [American Soybean Association](#) president and an Illinois farmer. “We are committed to establishing both a cause and a path forward ... including what actions need to be taken to assure that soybean farmers can use the product safely without damaging their own or their neighbors’ crops.”

Arkansas state officials have proposed a ban on spraying dicamba on soybean and cotton crops from April 16 to October 31 next year, and EPA officials have said the agency is considering additional restrictions on how and when the chemical is used. Monsanto, which makes dicamba, says most of the reported damage is the fault of farmers and



applicators, not its new, more drift-resistant formulation of the herbicide. Monsanto sells Xtend soybean and cotton strains genetically engineered to tolerate the weedkiller. Growers have embraced dicamba as a new tool against invasive weeds that are resistant to other herbicides.



Gil Gullickson

The ASA is working with university researchers and ag chemical companies “to determine what went wrong and how we can move forward,” said Moore.

South Dakota state agriculture officials “are looking at possible label changes for spraying dicamba on Xtend soybeans next year, but a lot of that hinges on what farmers find in the fields this fall,” said the Duluth (Minnesota) [News Tribune](#).

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Work on catch basins hits major snag

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As the City of New Orleans continues to get its pumps working to full capacity, repair all of its turbines that fuel the pumps and clear out the city's catch basins during the peak of the Atlantic hurricane season, efforts to ensure that all of the catch basins are clear of debris and working properly have hit a major snag, WWL News reported last week.

The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality told a local contractor to stop clearing debris from catch basins and drain lines, raising concerns about where the contractor, RAMJ Construction LLC, was dumping the debris its vacuum trucks pulled out of the city's drainage system.

Despite the city's efforts to prevent additional flooding like that which took place on July 22 and Aug. 5 in parts of the city like Tremé, Gentilly, Lakeview and Mid-City, the DEQ put the brakes on the city's "emergency" plan to clean 15,000 catch basins because the city and RAMJ Construction didn't have a written plan for safely disposing of the debris.

"We've asked them not to dispose of any material until they get a plan in place that we approve," Greg Langley, Communications Director for DEQ, told WWL.

The vacuum/flush trucks use water to force clogs out of the city's smaller drain lines. Anything greater than 36 inches in diameter is the responsibility of the Sewerage & Water Board.

Water and sludge vacuumed out of the catch basins and drain lines gets pulled into a tank on the trucks, but according to the DEQ, liquids can not be dumped in a landfill.

“They have to spread the solids at an offsite location to let it dry, then taken to a landfill,” Langley said.

The City of New Orleans submitted a dumping plan to the agency Monday, and while Langley said the agency will expedite the review process, it’s an added delay to years of deferred maintenance of the drainage system.

Rain water inundated some homes and businesses on July 22 and again on August 5, causing an uproar among residents after the S&WB admitted that some of the city’s drainage pumps were broken or were down for maintenance.

The floods led Mayor Mitch Landrieu, who was out of town at the time of the Aug. 5 flood, to declare a state of emergency because of the diminished drainage capacity, should a tropical weather system dump large amounts of rain on the city during hurricane season.

The flooding “scandal” ultimately led to the resignations and termination of several of the S&WB’s top officials and board members.

The city issued an emergency contract up to \$4,537,500 to RAMJ Construction to clean the catch basins and smaller drain lines September 6, a month after the last flood.

“As is typical for these types of projects, one priority of the first week was to finalize all logistics. When it became clear that the contractor needed a better process to appropriately dispose of the solid and slurry waste products from the storm drains, DPW met with representatives of LDEQ for consultation on the disposal process last week,” said Erin Burns, Press Secretary for Mayor Mitch Landrieu.

Before the summer floods, two of the five vacuum trucks operated directly by the New Orleans Department of Public Works were out of service. Since then, one of those has been repaired and returned to service.

A statement released as an update to the city’s drainage system last month said, “DPW cleans an average of five to six catch basins per day per vacuum truck crew for an average of 4,263 catch basins per year.”

Langley said it is unclear where the City has been dumping material cleaned by DPW trucks in the past since there was no DEQ-approved plan in place.

The emergency contract with RAMJ Construction states, “The Contractor will be required to dispose of the any debris at a sanction licensed landfill, as approved by the City and any other regulatory agency. Contractor is also responsible for any permitting or fees associated with debris removal and disposal activities.”

Langley said RAMJ was represented in a DEQ meeting with city representatives on Friday and said that RAMJ indicated that at least 10 loads of debris may have been inappropriately dumped at various landfills throughout the metro area.

Landrieu’s press secretary said DPW has met with the DEQ three times since the catch basin- cleaning project began in earnest September 7.

“We expect to have final resolution tomorrow and be positioned to resume work shortly,” Burns said.

Adding to the city’s woes is a boil-water advisory issued Wednesday for the East Bank of Orleans Parish, a move to guard against any possible contaminants in the city’s tap water.

Even before the floods on July 22 and Aug. 5, questions arose about the safety and quality of the city's tap water and the methodologies used to test it for high levels of lead.

Then S&WB executive director Cedric Grant was criticized harshly this summer for including the homes of S&WB employees in lead-testing efforts.

This article originally published in the September 25, 2017 print edition of The Louisiana Weekly newspaper.

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The scopes of work include but are not limited to the following: electrical, plumbing, site prep, installation of pilings, sheet rock install, HVAC, foundation, flatwork, block work, closed cell foam insulation, cabinets, landscaping, vibration monitoring, pump truck, and more.

Material quotes for the following: concrete, trusses, paint, flooring.

NOAHH encourages any DBE-certified contractors to submit quotes.

Email Ellen at ellenr@habitat-nola.org for an application package.



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NMED Confirms Lifting 'Boil Water Advisory' For Artesia Municipal System, Morningside Users Coop

Submitted by Carol A. Clark on September 26, 2017 - 6:50am



NMED News:

SANTA FE — The New Mexico Environment Department's (NMED) Drinking Water Bureau is confirming that the Artesia Municipal Water System has met the requirements to lift the "boil water advisory" for the Artesia Municipal Water System and Morningside Water Users Cooperative located in Eddy County.

Artesia Municipal Water System and Morningside Water Users Cooperative were required to issue the advisory Sept. 16, 2017 after bacteriological contamination that exceeded the Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) for E. coli was discovered in drinking water at the Artesia water system. The advisory only applied to customers served by the Artesia Municipal Water System and Morningside Water Users Cooperative and did not extend to any of the other surrounding water systems or communities.

Consumers of water at the Artesia Municipal Water System and Morningside Water Users Cooperative were advised to boil the water for one minute [3 minutes if above 6,500 feet in elevation] before drinking, cooking, washing fruits and vegetables, feeding a baby, brushing teeth, preparing drinks, making ice, and providing drinking water for pets.

The presence of E. coli in water indicates that the water may have been in contact with sewage or animal wastes, and could contain disease-causing organisms. Most strains of E. coli are harmless and live in the intestines of healthy humans and animals. However, a positive test for E. coli in the drinking water supply may have indicated the presence of dangerous strains of E. coli or other disease-causing organisms.

These types of organisms could cause severe gastrointestinal illness and, in rare cases, death. Children, the elderly and immuno-compromised individuals are at an increased risk for illness.

The NMED's Drinking Water Bureau provided compliance oversight and technical support to the Artesia Municipal Water System and Morningside Water Users Cooperative. Subsequent samples collected from the water system were negative for bacteriological contamination. The Artesia Municipal Water System and Morningside Water Users Cooperative will be required to complete an assessment of the water

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system and maintain a regular monitoring schedule to test the distribution system for the presence of Total coliform & E. coli.

For more information, call Drinking Water Bureau Brandi Garcia, NMED DWB Southern Area Supervisor at 575.915.1113 or Brandi.Garcia@state.nm.us.

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